

ABC NIGHTLINE

20 November 1984

KOPPEL: Good evening. I'm Ted Koppel, and this is Nightline. He sees himself as the ultimate Arab leader. He has supported international terrorism. He's underwritten political assassination. And he's engaged in a frantic effort to buy his own nuclear bomb. Libya's Moammar Khadafy, how much longer will the rest of the world put up with him?

* * * * *

DUNSMORE: However complex Khadafy's personality, analysts are unanimous that he is driven by a single-minded ambition. He wants the mantle of former Egyptian President Nasser. He wants to reunite and lead the Arab world. It has been his greatest frustration that he comes from a tiny country of some 3 million people and therefore has no legitimate power base. ROBERT KUPPERMAN (Center for Strategic and International Studies): He's a one-man source of tyranny, with a comparatively small following that is willing to violate all of the international norms of decency and who somehow has maintained a high degree of personal charisma and zealotry upon the part of his followers.

DUNSMORE: Most of his escapades, however egregious, can be seen as attempts to make himself important. He has dispatched hit squads to assassinate President Reagan and former Secretary of State Haig. He has mined the Suez Canal. He has

made war on the Sudan. And he has eliminated untold numbers of his opponents within and outside of Libya. The latest incident in Egypt would be, for him, only a minor setback. If you take a map of the world and then paint red every country where Khadafy has supported terrorist groups, tried to overthrow the government, sent in hit squads to assassinate political leaders or tried to form

a political union, the map will be redder than during the heyday of the British empire. There are rather more important reasons for the British to dislike Khadafy. In April, a man inside the Libyan People's Bureau here in London fired

on a crowd of demonstrators, killing a policewoman. After the shooting and siege here at the People's Bureau, many Britons were asking the old questions, 'Why do we put up with Khadafy? Why not cut off all ties and isolate him?' And back came the same old answer, 'Well, Khadafy may be bad politics, but he is good business.' There's no question that Khadafy's oil money has created a tolerance for his behavior, which would otherwise not exist. Britain broke relations but continues to trade with Libya. France stood up to Khadafy in the civil war in Chad, but President Mitterrand's critics say he was out-manuevered by Khadafy into a premature withdrawal from Chad because the French want to resume arms sales to Libya. Even the United States, despite all the public hand-wringing, still does business with Libya. One thousand Americans continue to work there, and U.S. oil companies continue to make millions. Ironically, parts of the Arab world believe Khadafy survives because he is a creature of the

CIA. In this view, said to be held by senior Saudi Arabian officials, Khadafy is useful because he could give the U.S. access to his Soviet weaponry, and he is a divisive force in the Arab world. Actually, the greatest concern for Washington is the possibility that Khadafy might get his hands on nuclear

Continued

weapons. And according to ABC's John Cooley, who has exhaustively researched this subject, Khadafy has never stopped trying. JOHN COOLEY (ABC News): Khadafy has been trying to either buy nuclear weapons or acquire the means to make them himself ever since he came to power in 1970. He began by trying to buy a bomb from the Chinese in Peking. That didn't work. He turned to the United States and to France and the Soviet Union to try to buy nuclear reactors, with which he could make plutonium. A very large Belgium company even now has a \$1 billion deal on the fire, which the United States is blocking.

* * * * *

KOPPEL: . . . -I, I realize it's an outrageous question, but I cannot believe that at some time or another it has not been raised, not only in the U.S. government but in other governments around the world. Why not kill him?

* * * * *

KOPPEL: Ambassador Helms, you were once director of the CIA. I, I realize this is a, a very touchy subject to talk about, ah, particularly in, in the light of some of the charges that have been leveled against the CIA. But is this the sort of thing that, that a civilized government such as ours should be thinking about, talking about. AMB. RICHARD HELMS (former CIA director): Well, the American public simply won't sit still for it. There's no argument about this. The firestorm started in 1975 in this country over some alleged assassination plots that the CIA was supposed to have cooked up, when the CIA never killed any foreigner, let alone a foreign leader. It tells one right away that killing chiefs of state of other countries is simply not on as far as the American public is concerned. But even that is sort of begging the question. If one is really interested in dealing with international outlaws like Khadafy, then the free world countries oughta have the guts enough to get together, pull their nationals out of there, pull their businessmen out of there and make life hard for these fellows. That's one way to do this, and it's the thing that the United Nations has originally established to do and seems unsuccessful to do. But certainly, it oughta be tried one of these times. We sat by for 400 days with our hostages in Iran, another outlaw country. And if all the countries of Western Europe had banded together against Iran at that time, those hostages would have been there probably two weeks.

KOPPEL: When you use the phrase 'make things hard,' what does that mean?

HELMS: Well, ah, if you take away Mr. Khadafy's oil revenues, I think his people will see, ah, find some way to deal with him, either politically or economically or some way. But I think he would disappear from the scene.

KOPPEL: But as far as direct action is concerned, you don't think that that should even be contemplated. HELMS: I think if the United States were to take direct action against Col. Khadafy, they'd make him a martyr in the Arab or at least in the Moslem world, and we might have a worse situation on our hands.

* * * * *

EXCERPTED